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SUBJECT: CHIRAC REMAINS TRUE TO FORM IN NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE
TO DIPLOMATIC CORPS

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Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) In the traditional New Year's remarks to the Diplomatic Corps on January 5, President Chirac delivered a distillation -- with only a few months left in office, perhaps his last -- of his exceedingly "Gaullist" (France-centric) world view. He broke no new ground, restating long-held French views of France "as the bearer of an independent worldview," with its own (unchanging) prescriptions for making global growth more equitable, managing climate change, ending the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, and checking what he called the "merging of different conflicts" in the Middle East. Chirac did not once specifically mention the U.S. However, it was clear by implication, through all of his assessments and proposals, that the approaches supported by France were to be understood as alternatives to those associated with the U.S. He disparaged the war to liberate Iraq as an "adventure," and presented as self-evident that -- "as France sensed and feared" -- the U.S.-led war "triggered upheavals" that continue to reverberate, with negative consequences, throughout the region. He didn't need to remind either those present nor those watching on TV that Chirac sees France's challenging the U.S. over Iraq in 2003 as a significant legacy of his presidency. End Summary.

Unabashed Commitment to the Gaullist,

French Exception

2. (C) There was a frozen-in-time quality to much of the substance and tone of Chirac's distillation of his worldview delivered to the Diplomatic Corps on January 5. Chirac began with the usual underlining of the vast changes wrought by globalization, the end of the Cold War, etc. In the current "accelerated and fluid" context, according to Chirac, "France exercises a special responsibility to serve peace, support the European construction and international solidarity and multilateralism." Throughout the speech there were also other affirmations of France's independent voice and of France's vocation for world leadership.

Champion of "Liberalism's" Downtrodden

¶3. (C) In his remarks, Chirac gave full vent to his conception of himself and of France as the sincere champions of the third-world poor, and as the leader and country that are authentically accepting of the different worldviews of other cultures and civilizations. Chirac applauded a putative "end of the proclaimed victory of liberalism" (read free-market globalization) and approvingly noted the "new awareness of the inequalities that persist on most continents." Chirac explicitly reprised suggestions he has long been making -- for example, a tax on international flight tickets to fund development assistance, a new UN agency dedicated to the environmental protection -- which he sees as elements in the substantive application of a multifaceted, multilateral tackling of global inequality. Returning to one of his signature themes, Chirac pointed to the danger of a "world threatened by a clash of civilizations fueled by mutual misunderstanding." Chirac characterized France as having chosen to "fight as the vanguard in the combat for the dialogue of cultures."

Nothing New on Key Foreign Relations Issues

¶4. (C) Persisting in the view that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is both fundamentally unchanging and is at the center of the endemic instability throughout the Middle East, Chirac decried the "double standards" that, he said, "foster a sense of incomprehension and injustice throughout the Muslim world." Chirac proposed, "in the context of the quartet" a "new type of international conference" which would, "without pretending to dictate the terms of a settlement," provide the guarantees needed to prompt acceptance of a peace deal by both sides. Chirac reiterated France's stand against Iranian military nuclear programs, and characterized as "provocative and unacceptable," the threats against Israel of "certain Iranian leaders." Chirac suggested that Iran should freely accept suspension of its

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enrichment activities to assuage the "apprehension of the world." Chirac called for the free development of democracy in Lebanon and singled out Syria for persisting in its designs to control Lebanon.

No Apologies for France's Iraq Policy

¶5. (C) Careful to not specifically mention the U.S., Chirac said that France's opposition to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq was prescient, and that subsequent events have proved him right. The dismissive characterization of the war to liberate Iraq as an "adventure," was as close as Chirac came to breaking with diplomatic etiquette. His stated remedy -- "restoring full sovereignty to the Iraqis" -- went unelaborated.

Against the Death Penalty, for the UN, and for the

Franco-German EU

¶6. Chirac ended his remarks mentioning "France's commitment to the abolition of the death penalty throughout the world." He also thanked outgoing UNSG Kofi Annan for the work done during his tenure and saluted the entry on duty of Annan's successor Ban Ki-Moon. Chirac said the Security Council's enlargement should be understood as "indispensable for re-inforcing its legitimacy." Chirac staunchly defended the "European social model," and traced the birth of the EU to "Franco-German reconciliation."

Comment

¶7. Chirac summed up his dyed-in-the wool, neo-Gaullist foreign policy principles and in so doing he recommended that France stick to them. In all, the remarks reprised views -- including firmly Gaullist insistence on France's independent, putatively leading role on the world stage -- that are

tried-and-true, vintage French foreign policy principles. In all likelihood, this is the last time Chirac will deliver such a widely-followed, comprehensive overview of his vision of France's foreign relations. In addition, Chirac, just four months before a watershed presidential election for France, also challenged would-be successors, implicitly warning them against adopting a different set of principles and approaches for France's foreign policy. End Comment.

18. For English translation of Chirac's address, see www.elysee.fr

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